

“Second Sunday after Christmas Catechesis”

Today we have what I would call – a little “Second Sunday after Christmas Catechesis.” This Catechesis is for all of us – not just those who gather on Wednesday evenings to study the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the Small Catechism.

For them, classes will resume this Wednesday after having three weeks off – two for Christmas, and one for the Wednesday before Christmas when the windstorm knocked out power to the church.

Like those Catechesis classes – this “Second Sunday after Christmas Catechesis” is one of questions and answers being echoed back and forth – and hopefully, one full of growing in wisdom and understanding.

Have you ever wondered what 12-year-old Jesus and the teachers at the Temple are studying? The text doesn't say – but it does say that God's people had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast – and is likely a focus of the questions and answers going back and forth.

Passover – that week long OT feast that celebrated God's deliverance of Israel in days of old. The main course was the Passover lamb – whose flesh was eaten and whose blood was spread upon their doorframes – all with the promise that the angel of death would pass over their houses – that death would not come to them.

That first Passover took place in the context of bondage and slavery at the hands of the Egyptians – years and years of harsh taskmasters and heavy labor. When Israel observed Passover each year – they both celebrated God's great deliverance of old – but also looked forward to the Messiah, who would deliver them from the bondage of sin and death – whose blood would cause death to pass over them.

On the surface this text is about a lost boy and his parents who frantically search for him. The lesson here is about finding Jesus where it is necessary for Him to be – “in the things” of His Father. This is not just about a location for finding Jesus (as our English translation suggests), “in my Father's house” – but quite literally, “in the things of my Father” – that it is necessary for Jesus to be doing the Father's business.

One of the things we do in Catechesis class is take a Law/Gospel approach to the Holy Scriptures – trying to properly distinguishing between what man is doing, and what God is doing. Here in our text, Joseph and Mary are searching – they are in great distress – because they’ve lost their child.

God, on the other hand, is answering questions – teaching – amazing people with His understanding and answers. God is doing what is necessary. Jesus is being “in the things” of His Father.

One of the great mysteries set before us in this text is that Jesus is, at the same time, true God and true man. Because He is truly man – He grows and becomes strong – He increases in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God. As true God, He knows all things – but for now, as He sits in Catechesis class – He both learns and grows – teaches and amazes.

At every Passover there would be catechesis. The children would ask their father as they were gathered for the Passover feast – why are we doing this – what is this all about (maybe even thinking to themselves, why do we have to do this)?

Jesus is with the teachers in the Temple – asking and answering questions like these – and the teachers are “amazed at His understanding and His answers.” Like the 40 days after His resurrection – when Jesus walked around, showing Himself alive to many people – and teaching them about the kingdom of God --- so, even now, at 12-years-old, He is connecting the dots for them.

The Passover of which the Old Testament speaks is fulfilled in the Messiah who is the Passover Lamb. All those bloody sacrifices point to the sacrifice that the Messiah will offer once and for all. Elijah raising the widow’s son from death to life – Noah stepping forth from the ark into a new creation – these are all a foreshadowing of our life in and with the Messiah, the Christ.

Like Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the magi – the teachers at the Temple are to treasure and ponder the things revealed to them about their Savior – so that they may live by faith, a faith that is brought to its fullness in Jesus, the Messiah.

Jesus asks a very good question of us today. “Why are you looking for me? Did you not know that it is necessary for me to be in the things of my Father?” What was true then, in the Temple – is true today – that Jesus is doing the business of His Father – works of creation, and redemption, and sanctification – necessary things.

It is necessary for Jesus to be right in the middle of all of it all. He alone, the Son of God, takes on human flesh (His incarnation, which we celebrate each Christmas) – to take our place – to live the life we were supposed to live, but have not – in order to recreate us.

He alone offers the sacrifice of atonement – to redeem hostages, paying the ransom price for all sin – and turning away the Father’s wrath at disobedience.

He alone makes us holy by His blood. He is the Passover Lamb whose blood is shed to sanctify us. “Wait,” you say, “I thought that was the Holy Spirit’s work?” The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead us to Jesus – after all, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me [to faith in Jesus] by the Gospel ...”

Like Joseph and Mary, after three days, we are led to find Jesus “in the things” of His Father – doing the salvation work that is necessary for sinners – rescuing God’s beloved children.

That is what Jesus is doing today – for you. In His Word and Sacraments, He spreads His blood on you – covering your disobedience, your rebellion, all your deadly deeds. Your bondage to guilt and the burden of your shame He lifts – having lifted your sins and taken them into His own flesh – bearing them to the cross, and ransoming you.

God’s own Son has come into the flesh to suffer and die for you – so that by His blood – death may pass over you. Jesus continues to be “in the things” of His Father – for your sake – so that the favor of God may rest on you.

Dearly beloved, let us learn this lesson well. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.